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CIA Under Scrutiny

Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D-Minn.) has called for a Senate investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency. The arguments for such a study are persuasive.

The concern is prompted, of course, by evidence that the CIA has long since ranged far beyond its mission of gathering intelligence, and become, as Sen. Fulbright put it, "an operating agency in the execution of foreign policy." The evidence is vast and on our mind, conclusive. Sometimes its bearing upon foreign policy has been inadvertent—as when the interception of a spy plane over Russia involved the administration in an embarrassing tangle of lies. But sometimes its bearing is deliberate and direct, as in the CIA's stirring a revolt in Guatemala, or trying to bribe the prime minister of Singapore, or asserting a dominant voice in the decision to launch the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Watching this enforcing performance, the nation has been entitled to presume that some decisions affecting the very survival of the United States have been largely left to unseen persons remote from any sensitive connection with the public mind

or indeed, with any overview of current history. This is certainly a heady role to be played by a police agency, and it is surely a role unintended in a system that charges the President, his State Department and the diplomatic corps with the conduct of foreign policy.

There will be—perhaps from the President himself—objections to McCarthy's proposed investigation. It will be argued (correctly) that the CIA's secrecy of operation is imperative to its success. Certainly what is wanted is no publicity carnival.

Neither is there any intention, by Sen. McCarthy or anyone else, to diminish the importance of the CIA's designated job. In the nuclear age, the importance of international intelligence can hardly be overestimated.

But just as certainly, the great decisions affecting the United States in its world role cannot be left with policemen, however efficient. The CIA must stay within its appointed bounds, and if—as has happened—it transgresses those limits, it must be quietly, discreetly, but firmly brought back into line.

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